Before the Manchu conquest, however, European missionaries had not only travelled in the interior but had effected a settled residence in several of the most important centers, including Peking itself.

The great wave of European exploration and discovery of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was accompanied by a fresh burst of missionary enthusiasm in the Roman Catholic Church, In the sixteenth century the Church experienced a quickening of its entire life—the movement which Protestants call the Counter Reformation. The Society of Jesus came into existence and the older orders were stimulated into fresh activity. Wherever the Portuguese and Spanish explorers and conquerors made their way—and often in advance of them—went also the missionaries. In India, Africa, both Americas, the West Indies, Japan, and the Philippines were to be found the hardy and courageous representatives of the Roman Catholic faith.

So far as we know, the first missionary to seek to penetrate China in this new era was the great Jesuit, Francis Xavier. In 1552 he spent some weeks south of Canton, on the island of Shang-ch'uan, at that time the chief headquarters of Portuguese traders. Thence he made futile attempts to reach the mainland, and there, near the close of 1552, he died.

Xavier was followed shortly by other missionaries, some of his own Society, under Portuguese auspices, and some, of other orders, from the Philippines. In time Macao became the seat of a bishop and of several churches and religious houses and the center from which many missionaries sought to enter the regions beyond.

The first really successful mission outside Macao was established by the Jesuits, and its leading figure was

an Italian, Matthew Ricci. Ricci arrived in China in 1582 and died in Peking in 1610. In the intervening twenty-eight years he did more than any other one man to win a hearing for his faith and to develop the methods which were to be employed by his colleagues and successors. He won the respect of many of the dominant scholar-officials by dressing as they did, by applying himself diligently to the study of the Classics which they held in esteem, by conforming to their practices so far as he conscientiously could, and especially by his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy,